

The World is Lonely, Dark and Deep by ViolentFlowers

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Comes Back Wrong, Future Fic, Gen, Post-Canon, ToT: Monster Mash, Trick or Treat Exchange 2016

Language: English

Characters: Barbara "Barb" Holland, Eleven (Stranger Things)

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-10-31

Updated: 2016-10-31

Packaged: 2022-04-01 21:29:20

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,053

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Eleven listens to the silence of the void. She doesn't reach out—not yet—she just allows the quiet to settle over her. Total darkness surrounds her, but soon she'll push her mind out and search for her friends. Peek in on them one by one, even if they never notice and can't see her.

For now she is alone.

Until she's not.

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Author's Note:

- For [Elleth](#).

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Barbara is standing there in the void, looking straight at her as if she knows Eleven is there. Her face is gray, her clothing ripped and dirty but she's more alive than the last time Eleven searched her out in the void. Months of desperately hoping that anyone could see her and finally someone can.

It's not what Eleven wanted.

"Gone," Eleven says, pointing at Barbara.

A thing curls out of Barbara's mouth, a long gray worm that licks across her face.

"Gone!" Eleven yells, the darkness around her rippling in response. Water trembling against her feet.

The tongue snaps back into Barbara's mouth like a startled creature and Barbara's face shifts as she shakes herself, straightening up. She frowns at Eleven, her eyebrows drawing down.

"No," Barbara says, her voice deep as it croaks out of her.

Eleven's hands ball into fists and she starts running toward Barbara, but a sudden wind picks up in the void and before Eleven gets close Barbara disintegrates into dust. Eleven skids to a stop, throwing

water out in front of her. She snaps her head back and forth like an animal searching for a threat.

The void is empty.

"Not gone," Barbara says into Eleven's ear, startling her. Eleven turns, screaming into the void, causing the darkness to tremble and the ground to shake around her, but all she hears afterward is broken laughter echoing.

"Bad," Eleven says, panting. "Bad monster."

"Maybe," Barbara says, appearing again, but she's changed and Eleven pauses. Barbara looks almost normal now, as if she was never dead and then she flickers. Shifting back and forth from pale dirty gray skin to normal, like a faulty light. "Maybe not. Don't know, everything is wrong," she says, trailing off to look around the void before she refocuses on Eleven, her voice deepening as she flickers gray, "I know I'm wrong."

"Wrong," Eleven agrees.

"But maybe, it can be fixed." Barbara flickers back to normal and stops, she looks around the void as if it's all new before finally refocusing on Eleven and startling in shock, her expression changing completely to someone real, someone kind. "Whoa! Who are you? How did you get in here? Are you okay?"

Eleven backs away quickly when Barbara tries to walk forward, as if the hand reaching out for her is a snake. Barbara stops but she looks so concerned, it's wrong, wrong.

Barbara flickers back to gray and the concern vanishes, replaced with a cruel smile that crawls across her face.

"Liar," Eleven says, stomping her foot and splashing water around.

"Oh no, that's truly me, but then so is this," Barbara says, gesturing at herself before she flickers back to normal, looking hurt and confused, "What's wrong, are you afraid of me?"

"Monster!"

"Oh! Oh, thank god, you've seen it, too." Barbara looks around as if check the void for something, as if there is something to see that Eleven can't. "What the hell was that thing?"

Eleven shakes her head. "No. You. You are the monster."

But Barbara looks so confused. "What? What did you say? I can't understand."

"You are the monster." Eleven points at her.

But Barbara cups a hand around her ear and raises her voice, "I can't hear you! It's too loud." And then she stills, going gray again. "What's that smell? It smells... good." The worm comes out of her mouth and for a moment Barbara flickers to something else and she looks nothing like a person or the Demogorgon.

Barbara is different.

"Don't," Eleven says, stepping toward her but Barbara doesn't pay her any mind as snaps back to normal.

Barbara starts to walk away without a backward glance. "Nancy? Nancy is that you?"

"Stop!" Eleven yells, voice high and the word stretches in her mouth. It rises in intensity and the void ripples before it cracks and breaks. The weakest of light pours in, chasing the pure blackness away as shapes form out of nothing. Dust floats in the air and Eleven shivers in the Upside Down, she can feel the cold again.

They are back in the school, at the last place Eleven existed in the real world, the last place she'd stood her ground. Barbara has gone gray again, her back to Eleven, body held unnaturally still and for a moment Eleven wonders if she'll obey, but Barbara shakes her head.

"No," Barbara says, turning to look over her shoulder, "no stopping." But she smiles again. "Let's play a game."

"A game?" Eleven hugs herself. It's cold here, already it's penetrating her clothing and her breath is hanging in the air.

"Yes," Barbara says, "try and catch me," and then she runs.

"No!" Eleven yells but even as she sprints after Barbara, by the time she reaches the door it's too late; the hallway outside is empty.

She hugs herself, looking around the broken desolate landscape, alone but no longer trapped in the void. Eleven realizes that from here she could find Mike, that she could step back into the real world and leave this all behind.

But as she stands there she can feel little ripples of water against her feet, she looks down and wiggles her dry toes. The sensation lingers, a weak remnant of the void. Out of place like both Barbara and her.

Eleven sighs, even if they wanted to disappear back into the real world, she's not sure either Barbara or her could, everything's wrong and there's too much unfinished business. Eleven squares her shoulders, drops her hands, and reaches out to feel for the wake of Barbara's progress. She's not that far away but she's on the move, the prowl.

Eleven balls her hands into fists. She's never played a game before and doesn't understand the rules completely, but she's always wanted to play.

"Ready or not, here I come," she says, her voice echoing strangely as she starts to move forward into the unknown.

Author's Note:

Thanks to my wonderful beta readers, Htbthomas and Threadofgrace, for all the help!